



Information Bulletin

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

Law Enforcement Branch

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Law Enforcement Response to Multi-Casualty Incidents

January 21, 2003

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OVERVIEW

Law enforcement professionals will likely be among the first public safety officials on the scene of a multiple casualty incident. Although specific predictions of terrorism incidents or natural disasters are not always possible, agencies must develop specific, systematic guidelines of what to do should such an event occur. The Law Enforcement Branch strongly advises all agencies to identify their role and responsibilities within your jurisdictions. The time to do this is *before* the incident happens.

Initial responders in any multi-casualty incident may be quickly overwhelmed when confronted by many injured or deceased. The presentation of horrific injuries, especially injured children, can in itself be traumatic. This bulletin offers an awareness of these issues in order to prepare officers or deputies, should they ever be faced with this type of situation.

An MCI incident may be caused by many factors, both natural disasters and man-caused acts, intentional and accidental. Examples are bombings, earthquakes, major traffic accidents, train derailments, to name a few. Given the current environment, the possibility of a terrorist attack looms heavily over us. It is important to consider the criminal causes of any incident and protect the scene, evidence, and emergency responders accordingly.

Any incident of magnitude may invoke the need for Mutual Aid as well as State and/or Federal assistance. Using the Incident Command System (ICS), the incident staff may be expanded to include these resources available to you using the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS).

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MULTI-CASUALTY INCIDENT PLAN

A "Multi-Casualty Incident Plan", normally held in the Fire or Emergency Medical Services disciplines, governs every jurisdiction. Usually an incident with five or more significant injuries will invoke protocols specific to your area. This plan outlines the necessary notifications to alert medical personnel. An initial estimate of the number of injured is important to EMS personnel to summon additional resources and prepare facilities for emergency operations. Provide this information to dispatch personnel as soon as possible. Having the first officer on scene of a disaster declare an "MCI" and an estimate of the number of injured sets the stage for recall of off-duty EMS and hospital employees, setting up trauma equipment, or clearing overflow patient areas.

If you are unsure of the extent of the incident, it is better to mobilize for the maximum number of victims that may possibly be involved. It is always easier to release responders when you find they are not needed, than to not have adequate people necessary to mitigate the situation.

TRIAGE

Some law enforcement agencies have instituted policy and procedures regarding their members conducting triage functions. In any case, follow your department's directives.

If the initial officers arriving on scene become embroiled in triage and treatment, they may not be able to carry out their primary enforcement functions. This is not to say ignore the injured, but rather to be cognizant of this issue and relinquish medical responsibilities as Fire and EMS personnel arrive. They will designate triage and treatment personnel as outlined in the Firescope "Field Operations Guide".

Using a standard triage system can expedite treatment by Fire and EMS responders by already separating those with varying degrees of injury. One such system adopted by the California Fire Chiefs Association is "START" (Simple Triage and Rapid Transport). Responders trained in this system can rapidly assess serious injuries and determine priorities for transport to hospitals or trauma centers.

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LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AT AN MCI

Law Enforcement has four basic functions at the scene of a multi-casualty incident beyond the basic tenet of providing safety for all those concerned. They must respond to these functions with a calm, professional manner. The four basic functions are:

1. Traffic Control- Both at the scene itself and the ingress and egress routes for additional emergency personnel responding to the scene. They are unable to help the injured if they cannot get to them. By clearing access routes, you may actually be able to save more lives than if you engaged in treatment of a small number of victims you may be able to care for.
2. Crowd Control- If uninjured and uninvolved people are present during emergency operations, they may interfere with those trying to tend to the injured, or become injured by dangers still present at the scene.
3. Criminal Investigation- Remember the emergency may have been caused by an intentional criminal act. You have a responsibility to make initial determinations and protect the scene and any evidence.
4. Death Investigation- Should any deaths result from the incident, you may have a jurisdictional role in determining the circumstances of death, especially if the event was a criminal act. You may also have a dual role as a Deputy Coroner in establishing the legal cause of death.

PROTECT THE RESPONSE

Many recent intentional acts of terrorism have been designed to hurt or kill emergency responders. Several recent bombings have initial detonations in order to cause a major emergency response, and then additional devices have been intentionally placed to injure or kill the responders. It is important to size up the scene and examine it for additional dangers. Keep this in mind as you direct people to the scene or set a command post location. Securing the scene and protecting the safety of those at the incident are of utmost priority

UNIFIED COMMAND

When a major event happens, initial response may be overwhelming. It is important for all disciplines, Law Fire and EMS, to act in concert. Their individual roles may seem unclear. Close coordination is essential to provide the best possible care for the injured and proper handling of the deceased. Use of the Incident Command System (ICS) is essential to provide clear responsibilities and avoid duplication of effort. The CALCORD radio frequency is available for on-scene coordination by all responding disciplines and can be used for tactical communications.

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In most areas, the Fire agency of jurisdiction has command responsibility of medical or rescue events as they pertain to the injured. It is important to place an officer, preferably a supervisor, at the Command Post to coordinate the law enforcement roles. Traffic routes in and out, helicopter landing zones, and security issues must be coordinated with other response personnel. It is also important to keep other disciplines apprised of crime scene issues, suspect information, etc.

CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

As stated in the opening paragraph, the presentation of many dead or injured people can be very traumatic, especially when children or fellow emergency workers are victims. No level of training can adequately prepare responders for major injuries sustained in explosions, collapses, etc. Many agencies provide debriefing sessions after the emergency has passed. These sessions help deal with the emotions that major trauma may evoke. These have proven successful in helping people cope with the situation and limit the long term effects that may result.

REFERENCE MATERIAL

The September 2002 issue of the *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* contains several excellent reference articles on this issue, including “*The Police Response to Medical Crime Scenes*” and “*Negative Influences of Police Stress*”. This issue is available online at www.fbi.gov.

CONCLUSION

A multi-casualty incident can be one of the most stressful incidents an officer may face. Proper training and mental preparation can alleviate the effects. The victims of such an event may benefit from the initial request for resources, including mutual aid from surrounding communities a source of additional personnel, as well as other necessary equipment or services. These may include changeable message signs for traffic direction, flares, cones, floodlights, extra portable radios, batteries, etc.

The faster these resources are summoned to the incident will shorten the impact phase of the disaster.

The OES Law Enforcement Branch can assist you in your emergency planning and response activities. To access the OES peace officer nearest you please contact the Branch headquarters’ office: (916) 845-8700, 24 hours a day.

This information was developed by Charlie Simpson of the OES Law Enforcement Branch and Marty Sanford of the OES Fire and Rescue Branch. Michael Guerin edited the material.